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C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 000164

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/31/2016

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SUBJECT: NORTH KIVU: SERUFULI VERSUS NKUNDA?

REF: KINSHASA 153

Classified By: PolCouns MSanderson, reasons 1.4 b/d.

1. (C) PolCouns spoke January 29 with North Kivu Governor Eugene Serufuli, immediately following a second and highly provocative attack against Serufuli's stronghold, Rutshuru, by disgruntled FARDC forces. Serufuli and MONUC sources agreed that the insurgent elements were taking advantage of a target of opportunity, since Rutshuru is essentially undefended by Congolese forces at the moment. The Fifth Integrated Brigade, which had been ordered back to its post in Rutshuru following the first, and more serious, attack against the city (reftel), has mostly deserted, leaving the defense of the city to MONUC forces. Serufuli, clearly angry, told PolCouns that many of the elements from the Fifth had gone toward General Laurent Nkunda's camp, possibly to join his group. He complained again that the Ministry of Defense and the Chief of Staff of the Army are effectively crippling the ability of the regional military commander, General Amisi, to respond to this problem because his "loyal" troops are not being paid or supplied.

2. (C) When asked what he, Serufuli, intended to do about the problem, Serufuli gave an uncharacteristically blunt response, saying that it is time for him to take a "more muscular" approach to Nkunda's presence in the province. He added, apparently just to be clear, that since Nkunda had declared war on him, Serufuli, Nkunda should be prepared for the consequences.

3. (C) Comment: While far from clear exactly how Serufuli would arrange Nkunda's demise, that was the intent of his statements. Serufuli has previously acknowledged that Nkunda's presence in his province is a disruptive force, but had claimed that the time was not ripe to take action, in large part because a frontal attack likely would provoke reaction from about a thousand Tutsi troops lingering near Nkunda's base. A frustrated Serufuli could be just venting, since it is far from clear how he can move against Nkunda now, with factionalism dividing his formerly loyal military forces. On the other hand, Serufuli might be able to come up with a non-frontal attack which would neutralize or eliminate Nkunda. We will continue to monitor the situation closely.

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